

I am Simon Silcock the co-owner and director of Bask Ltd ,Central Square, Stockport and I make this statement in support of an application to vary our premises licence.

The premises which now trade as Bask are located in Exchange Square/Grand Central. They were formerly known as Cafelito. Unfortunately our predecessors fell on hard times, having particularly been affected by the pandemic. Together with my friend and co-owner Benjamin (Benji) Taylor we recognised the potential to develop the site. We are local lads with considerable experience in the hospitality industry and have close connections with the community including Stockport County Football Club.

We made the decision to take on the site and re-branded as Bask. Whilst retaining the all-day cafe food offer we considered there could also be interest if we were to open later in the day.

Our improvements include the introduction of flower planters outside which not only enhance the visual appearance of the area but also discourage customers from using the public realm beyond.

Having inherited the Cafelito licence we started to trade in June 2022. As the licence was limited to midnight, in July we applied for a variation to extend the hours for Fridays and Saturdays to 2am. The application was advertised both in the press and on the premises and was approved without any objection or representation.

Business was an immediate success, so much so by October 2022 we were honoured to receive the Made in Stockport "Business of the Year Award".

And then in October 2023 we were nominated for Best Newcomer at the Made in Manchester Awards, which pitched us against 5 other top venues as a leading newcomer.

In formulating our plans for improving the site we recognised its privileged location being within the proposed Grand Central redevelopment, earmarked for significant investment by Stockport MBC, as well as being opposite the Station.

At the same time we were conscious of the need to be responsible and good neighbours, particularly with regard to the Holiday Inn Express Hotel opposite.

Due to our success and with a view to avoid causing any nuisance to the area we self-imposed a restriction on the use of the external area, strictly prohibiting customers use after 10 pm. Additionally we adapted a dispersal arrangement after 10pm which entails customers departing through our side exit, whilst at the same time creating a barrier to ensure they are directed to Railway Street and as such prevented from entering the Square outside the hotel.

I should say that these measures were an example of our concern to be neighbourly and were not as a result of any reports of noise nuisance. In fact we have never received any direct complaints of noise nuisance associated with our premises.

Our property, as well as the Hotel and Square are under the ownership of SMBC who we now know commissioned CBRE their managing agents to instruct noise experts Condell to carry out a noise survey of the general environment around Exchange Square and the Station. We were not aware of this.

In October/November 2022, Condell undertook a sound analysis. Naturally we were delighted to have it confirmed that one of the report outcomes concluded that Bask does not constitute a source of noise nuisance.

Notwithstanding this, we received a request from CBRE to instal a noise limiter device (see email 14/3/23 from Barbara Turner). It was explained this was required to support an overall Noise Charter for the Square. From our perspective this seemed unnecessary particularly as the sound tests had been carried out on a "worse case" scenario ie whilst our exit door was wide open with our music volume turned up!

However in order to be helpful we agreed and were assured that SMBC would contribute 50% of the cost. Our music system is therefore limited to an agreed level which cannot be over-ridden.

In May 2023 we became aware a new hotel manager was appointed. We thought it would be useful to meet but unfortunately the meeting did not go ahead.

I would like to mention Bask has no shortage of supporters. By way of example, in July 2023 we attended a "Town of Culture" launch event where Andy Burnham publicly referenced Bask as being a great addition to Stockport. Sacha Lord (the Greater Manchester Late Night Economy Advisor) is also a supporter as well as Paul Richards, who until recently paid us regular visits and even booked our venue for some of his events.

So far as Paul is concerned we have always considered we have a brilliant working relationship. Let me be clear, I have the utmost respect for all the tireless work he does for the improvement of our Town and how he manages his multi-faceted roles not only as CEO of Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation but as Co-Founder and Director of Marketing Stockport. I understand Paul is also a Co-founding director of Stockport Town Centre Business Improvement District. Someone commented he must have Stopfordian blood running through his veins!.

However we feel uneasy to know he is also a Director of Stockport Hotel Management Company. That is the Company that trades as Holiday Inn Express

who have lodged a representation against our 3am application.

Perhaps I should explain that following our initial submission of the application Benji and I met with Barbara Turner of CBRE who set up a meeting with Paul Richards (representing the interests of the hotel).

In an endeavour to reach some middle ground, it was agreed that the hotel would not pursue its objection if we amended our application from 3am daily to: Monday to Wednesday 10.00 to 24.00;

Thursday 10.00 to 01.00:

Friday Saturday Sunday 08.00 to 03.00 (see email 29/9/23 attached).

Rather unusually the licensing authority held back the start of the consultation period whilst awaiting word from CBRE that they were in agreement. Paul even suggested he could arrange for a discount or refund of fees we had paid.

Thereafter on the 9th October Caitriona Muldoon of SMBC licensing department circulated our variation application with the last date for representations being the 6th November. We were told to proceed to advertise our application.

During this period we were also in email correspondence with the police and I attach emails from Pc Jamie Ellison the police licensing officer who does not object to our application and praises us on operating really well run premises (see attached).

Having sat face to face with Paul in reaching the agreement above referred to, it came as a huge disappointment when we later received the representation dated 2/11/23 lodged by Khemaies Dedidi the hotel's GM. There was no explanation for the change of heart and it was even more disappointing that Paul, who had up to this point been super-communicative, fell utterly silent leaving matters to Barbara.

The fact is we already have a licence which authorises licensable activities until 2am Friday and Saturday. We self impose a last entry time of 12.45am and if this application is granted we will not permit any new entry to the premises after 1.30am (except for returning smokers). Actually we have a smoking area to the right of our side door. There are never more than 10 people in the smoking area. By contrast I have images of smokers outside the Holiday Inn at 02.20!

I find it difficult to accept the comments of Khemaies. We have meticulously analysed all 442 of the Tripadvisor reviews and can only find a single mention of our bar! Just one, which is extraordinary considering what is alleged and the hotel's website boasts "soundproof rooms".

I also find it strange that we have not received any direct complaint of noise nuisance. We are not so naive to suggest that there have never been any complaints to the hotel, just that it seems to us that this matter has been totally exaggerated.

Our reason for the 3am licence is that our customers find the convivial environment we have to offer to be to their liking. They have no interest in seeking a late drink elsewhere in Stockport and we find at 2am we are having to close a busy bar. I can say with confidence that by permitting us the extra time will in fact be to the advantage of the neighbourhood. I say that because rather than having to disperse everyone at once, our customers will have the extra time to gradually drift away. If granted we will stop serving alcohol at 02.30 with 30mins dispersal time. We will simply be keeping our customers in the premises without any late entry. By contrast the hotel can serve alcohol to its residents and guests 24/7.

So far as there is a suggestion that an 8am start time could somehow have a negative affect we will be happy to add a condition that any alcohol sales between 08.00 and 10.00am will only be as an ancillary to food (breakfasts).

Dealing specifically with Khemaies objection:

We are of course well aware of the four licensing objectives and pride ourselves in upholding them.

Prevention of crime and disorder - this suggestion directly conflicts with the evidence from Pc Ellison. There is no evidence of crime or disorder.

Prevention of public nuisance - we passed the expert's noise tests with flying colours - even on a worse case scenario with the side door being open.

Protection of children from harm. Absolutely zero evidence to support this outrageous suggestion. This is an unfortunate example of how an objector is seeking to portray our business in the hope of defeating our application.

Khemaies is even confused with regard to our current licence hours which are:  
Monday to Thursday 10.00 to 00.00  
Friday to Sunday 10.00 to 02.00

His suggestion that the hotel operates as "part of the local community" does nothing to detract from that's precisely how we operate. We are locals from the community rather than a transient GM seeking to exert unfair influence.

I suggest it is a tad disingenuous to say he "understands that Cafelito has attempted to make some noise mitigation measures". Of course we have, as he must have discussed with his director Paul and is possibly disappointed that we were exonerated as a source of nuisance.

There is no doubt Paul is hugely influential in the Stockport community. As I have said I have nothing but respect for his energy and strategic input as a leader. However that influence ought not be able to subsume the decision of democratically elected members of the licensing sub- committee who are tasked to reach determinations on the evidence rather than who has the most powerful voice.

I will be happy to answer any questions at the hearing and would respectfully ask the committee to grant our application in its amended form with the ancillary condition referred above.

Simon Silcock  
24th November 2023